

An Encounter With Afghan Concrete

By AE2(AW) Evan Hodges, VAQ-134

As with most stories in *Mech*, the day started off just like any other, but it didn't end that way.

First, I'd like to talk about the things that I do remember. I recall being at work early in the day and performing standard maintenance on one of our Navy EA-6B Prowlers at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. Even though we are forward deployed, our maintenance practices are exactly the same as back home.* First and foremost, we always wear our personal protective gear (PPE)—and doing so on this day may have saved my life.

We have to get the rest of my story from my shipmates, who later told me and our flight surgeon what had happened.

According to one of our line division personnel, I was troubleshooting an electrical discrepancy while sitting in the pilot's seat of Garuda 542. When I stepped out of the cockpit, I placed one foot on the external boarding platform, and then the other. Apparently I felt confident enough in my footing that I released my grip on the aircraft canopy—definitely a mistake.

Even though we don't see much rain or freezing temperatures in Afghanistan, there was enough moisture on the boarding platform for it to be slick.

As I let go of the aircraft, both of my feet slipped out from under me, and I literally was launched into the air horizontally. I fell eight feet, measured from the top of the platform to the concrete below.

You've heard it in *Mech* before, but it's worth repeating: Wearing a cranial probably saved my life. My head and back hit the ground, bounced up and hit again. I



reportedly was unconscious for around 30 seconds. The first person to reach me said I was twitching and unresponsive. I was able to talk when I finally came to, but I couldn't move and had no feeling in my limbs.

One of the aircrew who was getting ready to fly ran up and asked me my name and if I knew where I was. I guess I had the presence of mind by this point to tell him, "I'm in Bagram; I fell on my butt, and I want to get up!"

The emergency crew arrived in less than three minutes, and I was transported to the base hospital for X-rays and a CAT scan. After several hours of observation, I was released and diagnosed with only a mild concussion.

This is where my part of the story can resume because the missing seven hours ended with standing in front

of my B-hut, wondering how I'd gotten there. I'm told that after a head injury like mine, a person often will experience short-term memory loss for several hours. That's exactly what happened to me. I wish I could go into detail about the fall, but I honestly have no recollection of it.

Fortunately, I recovered quickly. Always be aware of your surroundings. I'll always make sure I have four body points of contact before letting go. As for my PPE, it goes without saying that I'll always wear it. 🦋

**All deployed squadrons should operate in this manner.*
—Ed.